

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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An exhibition of the art of India and Southeast Asia will open January 14, 1975 and continue through February 16 at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Drawn from the extensive private collection of George P. Bickford of Cleveland, the assembled works -- 90 miniature paintings and more than 40 sculptures and objects -- reveal the richness and variety of India's artistic tradition from its beginnings around the third millennium B.C. to the present century.

Earliest works in the exhibition are in the sculpture segment of the collection, and include a pair of small, carved stone "stamp seals" from the Indus Valley civilization (ca. 3000-1500 B.C.). From later periods come two fine sandstone fragments of 185-72 B.C. -- one of a face, another of a hand -- from the Buddhist stupa at Bharhut; and a beautifully modeled terra cotta head of Buddha from Kashmir, dating from the eighth century A.D.

The small scale metal sculptures for which Indian Asia is so widely noted also are well represented in the collection. Of particular interest are a Nepalese statuette of the goddess Devi, dating from the seventh century A.D., and a superb figure of Shiva as Lord of Music, an early Chola Period (11th century A.D.) bronze from South India.

It is the field of painting, however, that has most thoroughly engaged George Bickford's interest through the years. Here, in the painting segment

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of the exhibition -- which concentrates on works from the 16th through the 19th century -- are found excellent representations of numerous schools and styles of Indian miniature painting, as well as rare works of art of extraordinary quality.

There are, for example, several interesting and beautiful paintings of the Mughal style, a style initiated and developed at the courts of the Muslim invaders who reached India in the early part of the 16th century. Chief among these is an illustrated page from the largest and most famous early imperial Mughal manuscript, the Hamza Nama, of 1562-1577. Of equally superb quality is an album leaf of about 1650 depicting a group of palace women bathing at night under a full moon, innocently oblivious of a youth who has just arrived.

The collection also is rich in miniature painting of the Rajput style which centered around the courts of the Hindu princes of the Rajput clans. Of special interest is a picture of 1680 from Bundi, Kakubha Ragini, depicting a serenely lovely girl wandering in a glade of flowering trees. Another, is a magical Tiger Hunt, circa 1800, from Kotah.

From the Rajput courts in the Punjab Hills come numerous fine pieces, including a splendid page dated 1725-1730 from the Siege of Lanka series, formerly in the ancestral collection of the Rajas of Guler; and a famous group portrait of the young Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra (1775-1823), considered a key example of Kangra portraiture.

George Bickford laid the first foundations of an Indian collection fifty years ago. At the age of 20, after graduating from Harvard, he accepted a post as a teacher at Boone University (later Chung Wha), a missionary

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college at Wuchang, China. In 1923 he returned from China by way of India where his interest in Indian art objects was first stimulated.

It was the Second World War that extended his interest in collecting Indian art. He was commissioned as a captain in the Judge Advocate General's Department in March 1944, and posted to New Delhi.

In succeeding years he has maintained contact with India, traveling there frequently. Also, in 1962 the Indian government honored him with an appointment as Honorary Consul of India in Cleveland, a post in which he continues to serve today.

Mr. Bickford has had close ties with the Cleveland Museum for almost two decades, serving as a Trustee of the Museum for 18 years, and as a member of its Accessions Committee for 16 years. He has made many gifts to the Museum, and frequently, numerous pieces from his collection have been on loan to the Museum.

Stanislaw Czuma, Curator of Indian Art at the Cleveland Museum, has selected the current exhibition, and prepared the scholarly catalogue which accompanies it. Sherman E. Lee, Director of the Museum, has contributed a foreword, and W. G. Archer, Keeper Emeritus of the Indian Section of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, has written an introduction.

During the next two years the exhibition will circulate to numerous Museums and university art galleries, going first to the University Art Museum at the University of Texas in Austin for an opening March 20, 1975. In following months it will travel to the Krannert Art Museum of the University of Illinois at Champaign, Harvard's Fogg Art Museum, the University Gallery of the University of Florida in Gainesville, the Phoenix Art Museum, the University Art Museum of the University of California at Berkeley, and the

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University of Michigan Museum of Art in Ann Arbor.

"Indian Art from the George P. Bickford Collection" has been installed in the Special Exhibitions Gallery on the second floor of the Cleveland Museum. Admission is free.

Gallery talks in connection with the exhibition will be held at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 15 and Sunday, January 19. In addition, two audio visual programs on Indian art have been scheduled on Sunday, January 19 and Sunday, January 26. These will be shown continuously between 1:30 and 4:30 p.m. in the audio visual center on the lower level of the Museum.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact Frances Stamper, Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; (216) 421-7340.